Eötvös Loránd University
Faculty of Humanities

ABSTRACT

Judit Takács

Austria in the New Europe.
Austrian Security Policy 1989-1999

PhD thesis

PhD School for History
Programme on Modern History

Consultant:
Dr. Jenő Horváth, CSc

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The Subject

The thesis examines Austria's security policy between 1989 and 1999. The reason for researching Austrian topics in Hungary is – apart from the two countries' geographical proximity and the immediate effects that developments in Austria exert on Hungarian politics, economy, and public life in general – the kind of reference role that Austria (and its political, economic, and social development that resulted in its establishment as a welfare state) has played for Hungary ever since the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and even more so since the end of World War II. The features of the Austrian welfare state that have been of a special value for Hungarian eyes are – besides the economic prosperity and its social derivatives – the consensual democracy and the grand coalition government that helped to overcome the sharp antagonism of the old political Lagers after 1945; the Proporz system; the social consultative mechanism that has influenced the governments' policies enormously; as well as neutrality that could be perceived as a kind of external dimension of all these political and social features.

Among these elements it has been neutrality, the basic principle of Austrian foreign and security policy, that was pointed at as a central factor explaining in the eyes of the Hungarian public the international prestige, the economic success, and the welfare system evolving in Austria after 1955. That led to strong nostalgic feelings towards Austrian neutrality in Hungary. An early proof of this sympathy for Austria's neutrality was the reference to a possible neutrality of Hungary during the 1956 revolution and the consideration of neutrality as an option of Hungarian security policy after the change of regime. Apart from its neutrality, Austria – due to its Ostpolitik and the revival of the Mitteleuropa thought in the 1980s – has always been a primary partner and reference point for Hungarian foreign and security policy. This partnership has further been confirmed by the two countries' membership in the European Union.

The Period under Examination

I intended to choose a single historical period for the analysis. The starting point of 1989/1990 was clear from the outset even though the changes of these years in Austria were not comparable to the global systemic changes that had taken place in the country's Central and Eastern European neighbourhood. Still, we can witness complex changes in Austria as well,

due to the effects – ranging from the economy to the soft dimension of security – of the changes of regime in Central and Eastern Europe and the Ostöffnung in Austria. The end of the bipolar world order has changed the country's global and regional environment, which explained and legitimised the changes in Austrian foreign policy of the 1980s, i.e. the greater attention paid to regional affairs and the formulation of membership ambitions in the European Community. The emergence of new states, the outbreak of the Yugoslav crisis immediately at the Austrian border, and tensions in the region triggered a process of adjustment in the security and defence policy, too.

This period of transition in security policy ended with the decade. The 1990s can be characterised by a permanent crisis within the grand coalition and a debate on security policy. The end point in 1999 signals both the establishment of the European Security and Defence Policy and the demise of the grand coalition government (and at the same time the formation of a clear majority on the political right) and introduces a new era in Austrian security policy too. The new coalition between the People's Party (ÖVP) and the Freedom Party (FPÖ) that came to power in February 2000 started a new and ambitious security and defence policy agenda and was also received with an international opposition that led in the end to the issuing of sanctions against the country by the other 14 members of the European Union, resulting in a temporary international isolation of Austria. The sanctions themselves – in addition to the new security policy pursued by the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition – required a basic revision of Austrian foreign and security policy. Because of this I regard the inauguration of the 'black and blue' coalition as an opening of a new era of Austrian security policy that starts with a sharp break represented by the sanctions period. In this thesis I did not attempt an analysis of this new era.

The publication of the 'Security and Defence Doctrine' in 2001 was a result of this new era. The Doctrine – though it aims at a revision of Austrian security policy and describes it as a policy of non-alignment instead of neutrality – does not represent a turning point in itself. Though it is a parliamentary document, it was passed with the votes of the governing majority, i.e. it is not a product of a political consensus. In order to modify or withdraw the constitutional law on neutrality – that still constitutes the point of departure for Austrian security policy – a two thirds majority is needed, but the governing coalition could procure this majority neither in the parliament nor in public opinion.

The 2000-2001 period was furthermore succeeded by a series of 'minor systemic changes' in Austrian security policy, such as the solidarity clause and the clause on mutual assistance in the text of the European Constitution and, later, in the Lisbon Treaty; the

Austrian decision of 2004 to take part in the Battle Group concept that is a manifestation of the third group of the Petersberg tasks (peace enforcement) in the Austrian security and defence policy. A similar turn was performed by the Greens when accepting officially the formation of a European defence policy and Austria's participation in the Battle Group concept; or the government's decision (upon the initiative of a social democratic minister of defence) in 2007 to participate in the EU's military mission in Chad and the Central African Republic.

The Aims of the Thesis

The thesis aims at describing and analysing a greatly dynamic decade of Austrian political history between 1989 and 1999 in a security policy perspective. The collapse of the bipolar world order at the beginning of this decade constituted a great challenge to Austrian security policy that can be compared to the regime changes in Central and Eastern Europe, because the new situation had to be met by a significant re-orientation of Austrian security policy and its central element, neutrality. The end of the East-West confrontation has practically left Austrian permanent neutrality without its reference framework, a 'permanent conflict'; there were dramatic institutional changes in the European security system that could not remained unnoticed by Austrian politics; moreover, Austria found itself in close geographical proximity to the continent's most intensive changes. All these had to result in a complete revision of the old cold war image of security. The main line of analysis in the thesis will thus concentrate on the Austrian reaction to the changes in the – global, continental, and regional – security environment and the process of adjustment to these changes.

The examination and analysis of Austrian security policy between 1989 and 1999 is recommended also by the lack of descriptions of this subject. Even though there were papers and monographs published on security policy and neutrality throughout the 1990s, they were meant to be contributions to the public debate and are thus pictures taken showing a certain moment instead of describing a process. Except for integration policy there was not even a comprehensive treatise of Austrian foreign policy available until the publication of Michael Gehler's two volume work on Austrian foreign policy in 2005. Security policy almost completely lacked such general overviews had it not been for certain writings of Heinrich Schneider and Anselm Skuhra.

Even though the changes in 1989/1999 constituted a serious challenge in respect of neutrality, it has remained the basic principle of Austrian security policy. This could be a

reference to certain values that neutrality might have in the eyes of the political elite and the public resulting in its survival and constant adaptation.

Another line of analysis will examine whether the traditional international role attached to neutral countries during the cold war has survived the end of the bipolar world order. As a neutral country Austria had merits for both blocks that led to its international prestige (that was by no means proportional to its size and weight), an active role in international institutions, mediation activities between the blocks or in a North-South relation, as well as Vienna becoming a seat for international organisations and a meeting place in international diplomacy.

A historical event of the 1990s was certainly the accession of Austria to the European Union. By the end of 1991 – well after the Austrian application for membership and shortly after the European Commission's avis on it – member states of the European Community signed the Maastricht Treaty that transformed the Community into a Union leaning on a structure of three pillars. The second pillar – known as Common Foreign and Security Policy, CFSP, since then – prescribed a systematic co-operation and common actions for the member states and called for loyalty and mutual solidarity in their foreign policies. Moreover, CFSP included all questions concerning the Union's security, 'including the eventual framing of a common defence policy, which might in time lead to a common defence'. The requirement of harmonising foreign policy actions, the possibility of qualified majority voting in the second pillar, and the perspective of a common defence policy (moreover, of a common defence) all required an adaptation of Austrian foreign and security policy.

Besides the changes in Austria's international role, it might be interesting to examine how the self-image of the country as a foreign and security policy actor and the picture of Austria in the eyes of the world, has change. As to the former, the starting point was the heritage of the old active neutrality policy, a positive self-image showing a morally superior and respected country that stands above block logic and militarism (a kind of 'Insel der Seligen'). The latter can be characterised by two end points: the Waldheim affair (1986-87) and the sanctions period after the Freedom Party's rise to power in 2000 which define a 'long 1990s' starting and ending with a certain degree of international isolation.

When beginning the analysis I assumed that the adaptation process of security policy to the changes in the international relations generated an internal debate within the political elite as well as the public opinion and led among others to a revision of the self-image described above. The outcome, the arguments and the opinions of the main actors in the course of this internal debate seemed also a worthy object of further research.

Further, I attempted to sum up the defence policy pursued in the period. It seemed to me that a description of the main tasks of the Bundesheer, the direction of the armed forces' development, and the changes in the doctrine could complement the thesis as it may show – even though indirectly – the modification of the threat perception and the assessment of the security environment from an Austrian point of view.

Conclusions

The analysis of Austrian security policy of the 1990s directs our attention to problems of sovereignty at first, which makes a comparison with the Central Eastern European states unavoidable. These states – once having escaped the constraints of the Eastern bloc – faced the problem of establishing their independent foreign, security, and defence policies at the beginning of the 1990s. The freedom of action of Austrian foreign policy has also increased significantly after the collapse of the bipolar world order, which at the same time called for a revision of foreign and security policy priorities and directions. Nevertheless, the transformation of the institutional system of global and European security undermined this recent freedom of action in foreign policy, as Austria was not a party to those very institutions that emerged as the central elements of the transforming European security system. These institutions on the other hand affected certain parts of the sovereignty of their member states because of their underlying principle of integration or collective defence. Austria thus had to face the possibility of partly losing its foreign policy freedom if it chooses not to give up participation and influence in these centres of integration or security. In the course of this process, according to a kind of social agreement, neutrality has appeared as a line that could not be crossed when confining the external dimension of Austria's sovereignty. The solution was then brought by on the one hand by achieving participation through forms other than membership, and on the other hand by redefining the very factor – neutrality – obstructing membership.

Remarks concerning neutrality

Austria has from the outset defined its neutrality quite freely. Despite of promising a Swiss way of practicing its neutrality in 1955, the government had made clear early that it will not accept one of the chief elements of the Swiss model and will strive for a membership in the United Nations. It also signalled that the country's neutrality will by no means result in an 'ideological' neutrality. In the period of active neutrality Austria sometimes defined its

neutrality in an even more restricted manner than the Swiss doctrine, e.g. in the case of the law on war materials. An external limitation to the freedom of interpretation was constituted by possible objections of the four great powers, signatories of the Austrian State Treaty (the Soviet Union had indeed offered its assistance to such interpretations at certain times), but this restraint disappeared with the end of the cold war. Austria made clear again that it intends to define its neutrality in a sovereign manner when it declared parts of its State Treaty obsolete in 1990.

Another proof of independence from the Swiss and other models of neutrality is the military dimension of defence that points to the abandonment of major European models of neutrality; the continuing low level of the defence budget (a 1-1.2% of the GDP dropping to 0.8% at the end of the 1990s), neglecting the establishment of afunctioning air surveillance, unrealistic defence concepts (see the Spannocchi doctrine and its manifestation in the 1985 Defence Plan), as well as abusing questions of defence by politics. This may be ascribed to the fact that the most realistic scenario of military threat for Austria was becoming the victim of a major inter-bloc war during the cold war, meaning that a real defence was to be expected from an active policy of neutrality rather than from military means. The post-bipolar world order then brought a further decrease of the defence budget in Austria (as a kind of peace dividend), even though the end of the cold war saw an increase in regional tensions and a greater possibility of military threats in the immediate proximity of the country. Besides the scarcity of financial resources another neglect of the political elite in the defence domain was a lack of strategic documents and thereby a lack of a clear definition of the armed forces' missions. The development of the armed forces followed thus no clear principles, which is amply proved e.g. by the obscure acquisition policy of the Bundesheer in the second half of the 1990s.

Another special feature of Austrian neutrality is that its significance surpasses the simple foreign and security policy domain. Due to the active foreign policy of the Kreisky era and the international prestige of the country, neutrality has become an element of Austrian national identity, apart from its function of distinguishing Austria from Germany. Any initiatives for a revision of security policy and neutrality thus could prove a very delicate business because of its symbolic character, and was most of the times avoided by the political elite.

Problems of the Self-Image

A further effect of active neutrality policy was a moral feature in the self-image of Austrian foreign policy, which fitted in very well with the pacifism characterising the political left in Austria. This moral trail led to problems in the Austrian self-image as it constituted a sharp contrast to the lack of evaluation of the historical role Austria played after the Anschluss and to scandals influencing the external picture of the country, like the Waldheim affair or – much later – the sanctions period in 2000. In these cases the antagonism between the self-image and the impression Austria made internationally was so strong that it led to a feeling of being misunderstood by the world.

A consequence of this moral trail was the value of multilateral and diplomatic solutions of international problems in the public eye, which fits too well to this traditional small state strategy. It often seems to the outsider that the clear expression of the society's commitment to neutrality is a kind of reminder for the political elite of the moral trail they expect from foreign policy.

International Role

As already in the second half of the 1980s the People's Party that gave the minister of foreign affairs in the new grand coalition proposed to re-direct the focus of foreign policy to the European and regional level instead of pursuing a primarily global agenda, the decrease in Austria's international role due to come after the end of the cold war did not bring a sharp turn in foreign policy. However, the political and institutional process overcoming the block logic, a revitalisation of the system of collective security (and Austria's membership in the UN Security Council in 1991-92), Vienna being the seat of international institutions (the beginning of the decade brought the CSCE's Conflict Prevention Centre to the city too), as well as being in the immediate neighbourhood of the two zones concentrating most of the changes taking place on the continent (the Central Eastern European and the post-Yugoslav region) gave a special weight to Austrian foreign policy even in the first half of the 1990s.

Though the 'bridge role' between East and West became unnecessary quite soon (especially because Austria was not a member of those international institutions that interested the Central and Eastern European new democracies the most), the mediation efforts in the Yugoslav crisis from the early 1990s made Austria a significant factor in the region. The loss of relative weight of the Third World in Austrian foreign policy was made obvious through the reform of the development aid policy in 1993 that singled out key countries to concentrate on. In the second half of the 1990s the regional orientation began to fade as well,

and problems (especially those concerning nuclear power plants in the region) undermined relations even to those countries that – having once been parts of the old Monarchy – had had a special place in Austrian foreign policy dominated at that time by the People's Party, a stronghold of the Mitteleuropa thought. This period was thereby characterised by a dominantly Western European orientation.

Obstacles of the Internal Debate

One of the problems concerning the debates on security policy and neutrality was constituted by the role of the latter played in the construction of Austrian national identity which made every attempt to discuss the basic principles of Austrian security policy with the public very difficult. Another danger underlying internal debates was the clear message on behalf of the society and its interest towards neutrality which induced certain political groups to oversimplify their argumentation and abuse the subject in order to gain political support by representing themselves as ardent defenders of neutrality. (This kind of populism was especially visible among certain representatives of the Social Democratic Party.) Due to this even the revisionists withdrew from further debate as addressing the neutrality taboo involved great political risks. This taboo introduced an irrational element in the security discourse.

The problem that prevented an objective debate on neutrality was reflected in a complete lack of strategic documents that should have dealt with changes in the international environment. The only document at hand thus remained the white paper-like 1985 Defence Plan. Even the 'Options Report' completed and failed in 1998 did not constitute a real strategic document as it aimed only at listing the institutional options of Austrian security policy.

Another trap of the security discourse was the dominant legal approach. Austrian foreign policy spent decades with mapping Austria's possibilities by interpreting neutrality under international law, and this approach did not lose its attractiveness in the 1990s either. When deliberating options of Austrian security policy, discussions were hampered by a purely legal approach, whereas political considerations were pushed into the background.

Duality of Security Policy

The political elite were wanting in a systematic approach to security policy too. From time to time they formulated propositions that revealed either a provincialism of the elite or a deliberate deception of the public. It also seemed that the government acted impulsively both

internally and internationally and avoided consulting the public because they regarded it oversensitive in respect of neutrality.

Though it became obvious that the dreams on a European collective security system will not come true, the political elite in Austria still referred to the possibility of the establishment of a security system that is compatible with the country's neutrality. It was under this heading that the government pursued the alignment of Austrian security policy to the acquis of the second pillar of the European Union. After the Maastricht Treaty, the Austrian foreign policy redefined neutrality as its military hard core thereby adopting it to developments in the EU framework without inviting much public attention. Such was the case with the passing of the law on Austrian participation in international missions in 1997 without explaining its possible effects on Austrian neutrality. The ratification of the Amsterdam Treaty was followed by the inclusion of an article 23f in the constitution that allowed for the participation in the full range of Petersberg tasks without the public being made aware of the consequences. Chancellor Klima accepted in June 1999 the Council conclusions of Cologne founding the European Security and Defence Policy without reservations. It seems therefore that the government – while tying to avoid any debate on the choices of Austrian security policy – pursued a double-track security policy: a nominal one for inner-Austrian use and a true one in the spirit of European solidarity. As a diplomat formulated it in 1990: 'whatever policy we might pursue, we will call it neutrality'. It was not until 2000 that the new right wing coalition tried to close the gap between these two versions of security policy.